



COLVIN B. BROWN

He visits every city of more than 10,000 population in the United States to study and help solve business problems.

COLVIN BEARDSLEY BROWN, of Washington, D. C., is one of those rare individuals who holds down a job that is the only one of its kind in the country. For fifteen years he has been constantly visiting and revisiting every city in the United States with a population of 10,000 or more.

He is the chief of the Organization Service Bureau of the Chamber of Commerce of the United States, an organization composed of the leading business men of America, and with which local Chambers of Commerce throughout the country are affiliated.

Mr. Brown undoubtedly knows more Chamber of Commerce officials, and individual business men, from one end of the country to the other, than any other one man.

One of his chief desires has been to convert the average Chamber of Commerce from a "mutual admiration society of self-seekers, to a project that does things."

Another desire has been to convince such organizations that their interests do not end at the boundary lines of their respective cities, but that they extend out to—and through—the agricultural districts of their entire trade territory. As a result of his evangelistic work along this line, from 40 to 50 per cent of the membership of a majority of the Chambers of Commerce is now composed of farmers. The gulf formerly existing between the town people and the country people is rapidly being removed. They realize that each can help the other in many ways—and they are cheerfully doing it. The results are amazing.

At rare intervals Mr. Brown takes time to return to his office in Washington, which overlooks the White House, the State, War and Navy Building, the United States Treasury and the National Capitol. That is where I found this remarkable man the other day after I had been trying to locate him over a period of six weeks.

Go After What You Want

BEING anxious to know just what sort of a message he is delivering to the business men of the country during the present reconstruction era of America, I asked Mr. Brown to be good enough to imagine, for the moment, that I was a Chamber of Commerce somewhere in the Middle West, and to talk accordingly. What he said will prove of deep interest to people generally. Here is the speech he made to me, word for word:

"There are certain essential elements in the building and conduct of a successful Chamber of Commerce. The first of these is a clear understanding of the position it occupies in the community life. Those whose support is solicited are entitled to know that it is not organized and conducted in the interest of a group of individuals, but that the yardstick by which all of its activities are to be measured is the yardstick of community good.

"The second essential is a short, definite, practical program of activities. The people are not only entitled to know what the Chamber of Commerce is, but also what it purposes doing for the community.

"The third essential is the selection of committeemen with a view to their qualifications for carrying on the work entrusted to them.

"The fourth essential is a budget based upon the work to be done, the revenue for which is obtained from dues-paying members.

"Where the public has a right conception of the functions of a Chamber of Commerce, is in agree-

ment with its program of activities and has confidence in the official personnel there is little difficulty in obtaining the money necessary for carrying on the work.

"Busy workshops, fertile fields and easy means of communication from place to place are some of the elements that make a nation great, and a nation is but the sum total of its community units. Therefore many of our national problems could be solved if we could break them up into just as many little pieces as there are well organized community units, leaving it to each to do its bit. This is one of the reasons why we need well organized and well conducted Chambers of Commerce in every city and town in the country. These Chambers of Commerce are based upon the fundamentally sound principle that more can be accomplished by working together toward a common purpose than by individual effort, and experience has taught that nothing can stop the driving power of a community that is well organized, knows what it wants and is in agreement as to how to get it.

"There is one thing more in this connection. No matter how much character a man may have, no matter how clean he may be in his business and private relations, no matter how good a man may be, he is not a good citizen unless he does something for the good of the community in which he lives. There is a difference between being a good man and a good citizen, and one of the functions of every Chamber of Commerce is to furnish the people with an opportunity to express their citizenship in constructive counsel and action for the good of the entire community.

Serve in Peace as Well as in War

"YOU do not have to be reminded of what you did toward helping win the war. You responded to every demand made upon you without counting the sacrifice. You learned what you can do by doing it. Now there are other problems, and they may be as big or bigger than the winning of the war. People who ought to know tell us that very serious times are ahead unless we increase production. Can we not deal with this in the same spirit and the same way we dealt with the problems of war? Can we not prepare a local program of work that, although it be local, will be national in its effect? We have demonstrated time and again during the past four years what organized effort and aroused public opinion will accomplish. Why not, then, prepare a program that is big and vital and then educate and organize public opinion in its support?

"Let me make this a little clearer. Your community does not end with your municipal boundary lines. Your community extends onward and outward to cover your entire retail territory. It is the betterment of business and living conditions in that territory that we must have in mind. That is our charge. Now anything that can be done to increase production in our retail trade territory increases purchasing power and

HERE is a man who knows more business men than any other man in America, and he says that the Great National Highway is not the road from New York to San Francisco, but the road from farm to town. He speaks of a good many other things, among them our trade with other nations and among ourselves. It is a good talk from a man familiar with business affairs.

adds to the wealth of both merchant and producer. This is a national as well as a local service. It is doubtful if there is a community anywhere in our country that equals its production possibilities. Let us have a committee on production whose task it will be to formulate plans for increased production. The right sort of a committee, composed of men familiar with the territory, ought soon to be able to make a definite, practical, convincing statement of what can be attempted, and this statement can be made the opening gun in a campaign to secure public support of the plan.

"Another project demanding our attention is transportation. By this is not meant the checking of way bills, advising as to routes of shipment and informing members of changes in the rulings of the Interstate Commerce Commission. It is much bigger than that. It is not enough to increase production; unless we have quick and easy routes and transport to market, our increased production may be largely without avail. It is the task of a transportation committee to study the transportation situation in your retail trade territory, ascertain what are the obstructions to the free flow of traffic and formulate plans for the removal of the

obstructions. Sometimes these will be found to be lack of deep water in a harbor, a sand bar in a navigable river, inadequate dockage facilities, a ferry where a bridge ought to be, or insufficient railway, electric or motor truck service; but most of the obstructions to the free flow of traffic are found to be the character and condition of the highways leading into town. We have come to understand that the great national highway is not the road from New York to San Francisco; but that it is the road from farm to town. The transportation committee should be able to report plans for the removal of traffic obstruction and the provision of improved facilities that will be so compelling in its nature as to be certain of public support. Not an everything-at-once program, but a one-thing-at-a-time, and as rapidly as the public can be made to respond.

Should Work for a General Betterment of Conditions

"INDUSTRY, commerce and civics should all have a place on the organization program. Careful consideration should be given to the subject of industrial relations, to improved merchandising methods, the betterment of living conditions and to parks, playgrounds and schools. We want a contented working class, stores so excellent that they will draw all the trade in our tributary territory, and ample school facilities. And we want a city plan. Every city, no matter how small it is, should have a city plan, no matter how simple it may be. You should vision your city as you want it to be, and as you are determined to make it be, and with this in mind you will be constantly striving to make the dream come true. There should be committees for all of these.

"If you can plan so as to increase production, improve transportation facilities, bring about better relations in industry, increase and improve retail trade, and better living, educational and recreational conditions, you will have done your part in the national program.

"I have recently completed a tour of the principal cities of the East and Middle West in company of commissions from England, France, Belgium and Italy, during which we discussed business conditions here and abroad. During these discussions it became increasingly apparent that the continued prosperity of our country directly depends upon the ability of the world to buy what we have to sell and in our willingness to trade with the world on a fair basis.

While conditions in Europe are bad in every one of the countries they will be restored in time, but without our help it will be a long, hard road for them. The chief difficulty to trade is the rate of exchange. If the countries of Europe could buy from us on long time credits, so that they will have had time to recover when the bills fall due, they will be able to meet their obligations in a fair exchange. If they cannot get this credit they cannot continue to buy from us, and if they cease to buy from us there will be a slowing down of production in our country and many men and women will be thrown out of employment. We cannot afford to desert our allies in the hour of their present need. We have a very practical interest in their return to normal conditions, and we have the means to bring this about if we can only get our people to see the need and support the plan.

"America today is the creditor nation of the world. It is the only nation that pays its trade balances in gold. It has a compact domestic market making for quantity production and can produce much of what the world needs at a lower cost than any other country and at the same time pay the highest wages. In 1914 we had but 15 ships of 1,000 tons or over in overseas trade. Today we have 248 per cent of the merchant tonnage of the world, and our shipyards are turning out ships faster than all other countries combined. We are today the richest and most influential nation on earth.

"America helped win the world from ruthless conquest. It must now help save it from bankruptcy. I have visited over eighty cities during the past year, and the more I see of organized communities the more faith I have in the unswerving common sense of the people and the more confidence I have that the spirit which helped win the war will help maintain peace at home and restore order, and ultimately prosperity, to a stricken world. We may each do our bit, working in our own communities with the tools at our command, always having in mind that whatever of betterment we bring to ourselves we bring to the nation of which we are a part; and remembering that the nations with which we fought are still our allies and entitled to our friendship and our help."